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PERCEPTIONS OF UVM EXTENSION CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT  
RISK PROFESSIONALS AS A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

A Dissertation Presented

by

S. Ellen Rowe

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Specializing in Educational Leadership

October, 2007

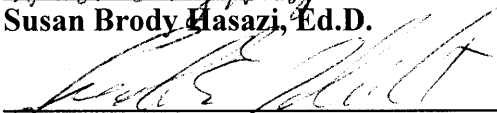
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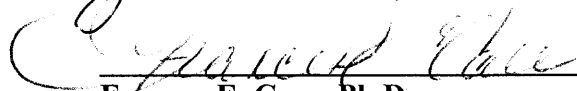
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## ABSTRACT

*Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR)* is a national program developed by Cooperative Extension's federal partner, Cooperative State, Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES). In collaboration with its federal partner and in concert with state extension systems across the nation, UVM Extension conducted an organizational change survey in 1998, 2000, and 2004 with a selected sample of UVM Extension professionals to determine the organization's capacity to address issues of CYFAR. Findings from these three surveys showed that Extension had not substantively altered its organizational practices in alignment with the goals of the national program.

In order to stimulate new strategic planning for the program, this study set about to assess the capacity of staff from UVM Extension to promote organizational learning. Grounded in the literature of organizational learning, this study administered a 43 item survey instrument called the *Dimension of the Learning Organization Questionnaire* (DLOQ) to Extension employees. As a strategic planning tool, the survey identifies organizational learning opportunities at the individual, team, and organizational level. Following the *Total Design Method*, the web-based survey was launched September 2006, with a response rate of 68% (n=63).

Findings from the new survey continue to indicate limited organizational capacity to meet national goals for CYFAR program. Interestingly, nearly 70% of survey respondents reported participation in programming for children, youth and families at risk, a percentage greater than those formally assigned to CYFAR activities. Regardless of formal assignment, however, CYFAR employees and non-CYFAR employees did not significantly differ in their survey responses across a variety of organizational measures. Prior training to develop organizational capacity in line with national goals appears to be falling short of expectations. Implications for these shortcomings are discussed and used to frame an action plan for development of this program.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Background*

This dissertation seeks to enlighten my understanding of the relationship between University of Vermont (UVM) Extension professionals involved in Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) programming and characteristics of a learning organization. The UVM Extension CYFAR program conducted three waves of evaluation using an organizational change survey document provided by CYFAR national leadership, yet the results from the investigation have not been terribly conclusive. Findings from these evaluations show no substantive organizational change, however.

The refocus of Extension's CYFAR program began as a national initiative in 1990 in response to conditions in America that place children and their families at risk for not achieving as productive independent adult citizens. Current data indicate that 25 percent of America's children are at risk for not achieving productive adulthood (National Research Council, 2002). Poverty, which is a problem in rural, urban, and suburban areas, is closely related to many of the negative outcomes for children and youth. These data, among others, establish the need for continuing a system-wide focus on vulnerable youth, a focus that is part and parcel of the educational outreach mission of the land-grant university system. Funding and additional material support for CYFAR flows through the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) via a threefold set of organizational objectives:

- Building Statewide Extension capacity,
- Supporting community-based projects, and

- Integrating CYFAR programming into Extension's base programs (i.e. the 4-H program).

The first of these organizational objectives, to build statewide Extension's capacity, is related to moving state extension systems toward the CYFAR vision of : *American families and communities in which children and youth lead positive, secure and happy young lives while developing the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary for fulfilling, contributing adult lives* (CYFAR Philosophy, April 2004, p. 1 ). Six outcomes are identified as central to building the capacity for Extension professionals to do CYFAR work:

1. Develop and implement a **common vision** and strategic plan for programming for children, youth and families at risk.
2. Train, support, and **reward Extension salaried and volunteer staff** for implementing programs which accomplish the CYFAR mission.
3. Recognize **Extension professionals as critical resources** in research and education for children, youth, family, and community issues.
4. Promote **diversity, inclusiveness, and pluralism** in Extension programs, staffing, personnel management and training, and policies.
5. Promote **internal collaborations** of Extension 4-H, Family and Consumer Sciences, Agriculture, and Community Development; and other University departments in programming for children, youth and families at risk across the state.

6. Promote and join **external collaborations** of community, county, State and Federal agencies and organizations to strengthen program and policy for children, youth and families.

### *Forces for Change*

Cooperative Extension Service started in 1914 by the Smith-Lever Act with a strong focus on increasing agricultural production. Home Economics skills began being addressed in the 1920s and 30s bringing information related to home, food safety and health to rural populations. In the 1950s, Extension expanded programming with a focus on natural resources and conservation development while increasing the leadership and youth development programming areas. Near the mid 1980s, Extension leadership at the federal level acknowledged the growing concern about the viability of the organization. Demographics showed a decline in rural and farm populations, Extension's traditional audiences. The National Agricultural Statistics Service data on Trends in U.S. Agriculture reflected a decline in the number of farms; this agrarian population was the traditional base for Extension programming. For example, between 1940 and 1990, the number of farms declined from six million to two million. Noting this change, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy or ECOP (1987) study recommended Extension programs "move away from the traditional discipline-oriented/needs approach to programming and provide cross-disciplinary and issue-based programming" (Klemme, Hausafus and Shirer, 2005, p.1). A National Initiative would focus the Cooperative Extension system's commitment, demonstrating our response through increased effort to address an important societal concern. The Youth at Risk (YAR) National Initiative of

1990 became a successful example of this new focus for Extension programs and the precursor to the CYFAR National Program which encompasses this focused work today.

The *Journal of Extension* carried several articles, beginning in the late 1980's, reflecting support for the YAR initiative as well as research on its success. In *Beyond Tradition*, Webb (1989) begins by saying, "The greatest obstacle we have to overcome in Extension is tradition" (p. 1). The youth most at risk are not, generally, among our traditional youth clientele, which are predominately white and middle class, residing in rural areas and small towns. "We are blinded from seeing Extension's potential by our incessant preoccupation with existing structures and traditional linkages" (Webb, p. 1). Webb suggests we move to adopt several of the opportunities that face Extension. The first would be to continue our primary focus in agriculture and natural resources and expand our vision and look at social and human issues that are of concern for the citizenry. Second, that we assume the opportunities to collaborate with other organizations and agencies while abandoning our go-it-alone attitude. In doing so, we look to work with others in effective coalitions to muster an attack on major issues realizing the time commitment of such productive relationships. A third opportunity we might investigate is to restructure our organization to reduce response time to issues. Developments and concerns go unapprised by Extension while we wait for the traditional process of higher education (scientific publication, academic debate and firm research conclusion) before we join with other concerned partners to address critical issues. A decrease in our response time mandates a flexibility of Extension thinking and organizational structure.

Boone (1990), in his *Journal of Extension* article entitled *Crossing Lines*, states that while “lines” within Extension provide for clarity in structure and responsibility, to address the complex societal issue of protecting youth at risk would require Extension professionals from traditional program areas of youth development, family life, community development, and economic development to work together in multi-disciplinary teams. A strong Extension staff development program is crucial to success in crossing lines.

To achieve this goal of effectively crossing lines, we must make better use of staff development in socializing new workers into the Extension culture and system. ... Further, we must use staff development to ‘rekindle the flame,’ the enthusiasm, and the dedication of our veteran Extension faculty to Extension’s mission and the need for them to adapt to a changed and changing environment. (Boone, 1990, p. 4)

The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), in proposing cross-disciplinary and issue-based National Initiatives, recognized the need for changes within the organization.

Changes were needed in staff attitudes and actions, programming model and delivery, management and leadership, and allocation of resources to better integrate and support programming efforts. In addition, some felt Extension’s public image would need to change in order to attract new clientele to the programs. (Klemme, Hausafus, & Shirer, 2005, p. 2)

The image may need to be viewed and redesigned to reflect programming beyond that of the traditional agrarian roots. These changes would reflect organizational change at the local and state levels as well as the federal level.

The traditional image of Extension's 4-H program is currently embodied by the 4-H youth development professional and their network of volunteers. Rennenkamp & Gerhard (1992) reported in the *Journal of Extension* on their study identifying barriers to conducting effective youth-at-risk programs surveying 4-H state leaders, specialists, county agents, regional agents, and county Extension Directors. Results indicated that addressing the demands of traditional clientele limits both time and other resources for initiating youth-at-risk programs. Barriers of highest importance identified by the respondents included "lack of knowledge, experience and skills for working with youth-at-risk" (p. 4). 4-H professionals were rewarded for large numbers of youth and volunteers involved with their programming. It is, therefore, no surprise that other barriers of importance identified included: "lack of leadership at state levels for embarking on youth-at-risk programming" (Rennenkamp & Gerhard, p. 4); "locating volunteers to work with at-risk youth" (Rennenkamp & Gerhard, p. 4); and "large enrollment numbers can't be achieved through youth at-risk programming" (Rennenkamp & Gerhard, p. 5).

The Kellogg Commission on the Future State and Land-Grant Universities published in 1999 *Returning to Our Roots: THE ENGAGED INSTITUTION* which provided a historical perspective and a call for action. "By engagement the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table" (p. 9). The engaged institution would apply its critical

resources of knowledge and expertise to work on the problems faced by the communities it serves. “This Commission defines engagement as something that goes well beyond Cooperative Extension and conventional outreach” (Kellogg Commission, p. 27). Extension has experience with communities facilitating dialogue, creating a forum for decision making process, and evaluation of the process. This report suggests the need to engage with communities to address critical issues, collaborating with University based colleagues to bring our combined knowledge and expertise to bear on these issues. “It is important to consider how to reshape cooperative extension so that it develops into what it has always had the capability of becoming, a powerful organizing center for total university engagement” (Kellogg Commission, p. 35).

Extension’s response to the Kellogg Report came in 2002 with the published report from ECOP (1987) purposing “a vision of the Extension System that addresses contemporary issues relevant to constituents residing within and beyond its traditional rural and agrarian heritage” (p. 1). Extension leadership is encouraged to forge relationships across disciplines in the university and to address societal needs, a position clearly in support of their 1987 report. Change takes time, especially in a mature and complex (multi-level) organization.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Environmental influences often stimulate organizational change. These influences include changes in technology. This requires new ways of thinking to work more effectively, enhanced by the benefits of computers and other technology. In order to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace and its growing globalization structure, it is essential that an organization realizes and responds to rapid shifts in the need for

products and services. Changes occurring halfway around the globe require continuous information for competitors to understand possible responses and related consequences. Organizations realize that for survival in this rapidly evolving environment, change is a constant that must be considered. They must become a learning organization and be flexible.

Peter Senge (1990) was one of the early leaders in defining the concept of a learning organization focused on systems thinking as the fifth discipline. Problems that organizations confront today come from past learning to dissect problems in order to analyze the parts and determine needed changes, thus gaining an understanding not just of fragmented parts of the problem, but how the parts interact as a whole in varying environments. For Senge, learning organizations create a culture where life-long learning is encouraged to develop the capacity of the people to reach their desires, where new patterns of thinking are encouraged, and where people learn how to learn together. The conceptual framework for this study is a model of organizational learning developed by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1997) identifying learning that takes place at the individual, team or group, and organizational level. Graphically the model may be displayed as two intersecting triangles. The lower triangle forming the base of the framework portrays the individuals that comprise the organizations. The upper triangle (inverted) portrays the organizational structure and culture established by the organization. Learning in teams, at the point of the intersecting triangles, is a way to bring together the personal vision of individuals and the corporate organizational vision. They have a pivotal role in bringing together the individuals who create new knowledge



and the actions that create the movement toward the organizational vision. Learning is increasingly complex as we move from individuals to teams to organization (Figure 1).

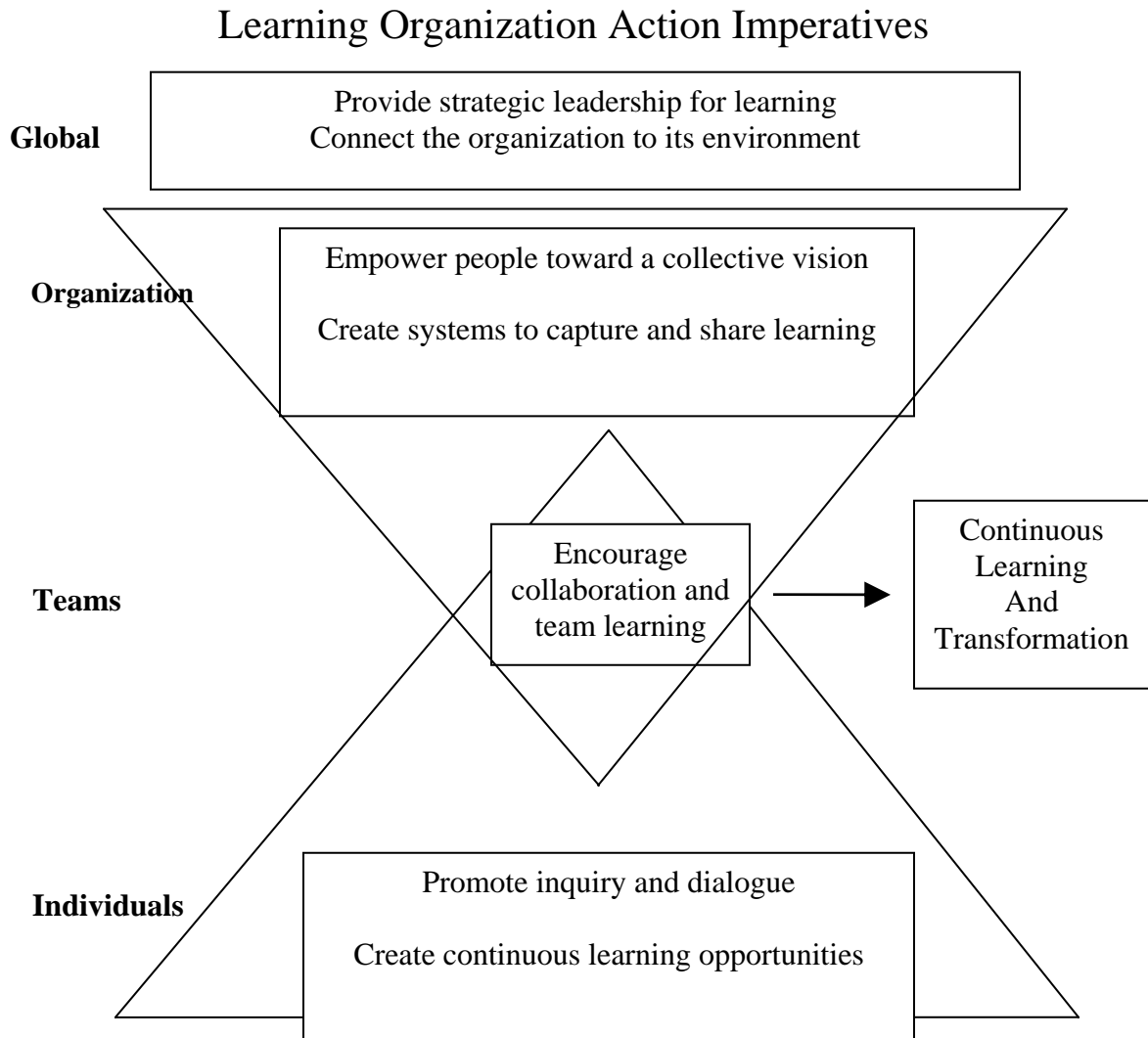


Figure 1. Learning Organization Action Imperatives  
Marsick & Watkins, 1993

Within the framework, Watkins and Marsick (1993) identify seven action steps that they call action imperatives. Each imperative defines a learning strategy essential to the total concept of a learning organization, such as to:

1. Create continuous learning opportunities;
2. Promote inquiry and dialogue;
3. Encourage collaboration and team learning;
4. Establish systems to share and capture learning;
5. Empower people toward a collective vision;
6. Connect the organization to its environment; and
7. Provide strategic leadership for learning.

Organizational learning is transformational learning and helps organizations understand and overcome the changes impacting them. If an organization is to become a learning organization, these seven dimensions should be well represented in the culture of the organization.

### *Statement of the Problem*

As previously mentioned, prior Organizational Change Surveys (1998, 2000, 2004) administered to a selected sample of UVM Extension personnel showed no significant change in the organization's capacity to address issues of CYFAR. The surveys essentially indicate that CYFAR professionals had not increased their capacity to work with the targeted at-risk populations, nor to act as collaborators to effect the broader societal issues. The problem is to understand how UVM Extension CYFAR professionals perceive their organization as a learning organization, learn exactly where we are in relation to the characteristics of a learning organization, identifying strengths

and weaknesses and develop an asset-based strategic plan to bring about the needed change. Such a pursuit would enlighten my understanding of the relationship between UVM Extension professionals involved in CYFAR programming and characteristics of a learning organization.

### *Research Questions*

Quantitative analysis of the 1998 and the 2004 Organizational Change survey data yielded very little support for the contention that CYFAR program capacity had changed. When change did occur, the findings from those surveys do not indicate how the organizational learning took place and how, if at all, it linked with Extension goals. The following three research questions emerged from these studies:

1. To what extent do the UVM Extension CYFAR professionals perceive their organization as a learning organization in relation to Watkins and Marsick's (1993) seven dimensions of the learning organization?
2. To what extent does select organization information such as office location, number of years employed in organization, employee title and level of participation in CYFAR efforts independently explain observed variance in Watkins and Marsick's seven dimensions of the learning organization?
3. To what degree does the UVM Extension, and in particular CYFAR personnel, perceive to demonstrate the principles or components of what we now call a learning organization?

### *Definition of Key Terms*

For the purpose of moving the discussion forward, definitions of several key terms are needed.

*Learning organization* is an organization of people that provide learning at the individual, group and organizational level with the ultimate goal of inducing innovation and change within the organization (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1997).

*Organizational learning* is the process by which an organization obtains and uses new knowledge, tools, behaviors, and values. It happens at all levels of the organization. Individuals learn as part of their daily activities, particularly as they interact with each other and the outside world. Groups learn as their members cooperate to accomplish common goals. The entire system learns as it obtains feedback from the environment and anticipates further changes. At all levels, newly learned knowledge is translated into new goals, procedures, expectations, role structures, and measures of success. (Bennis & Nanus, 1985)

*Dimensions of the learning organization* are action imperatives that facilitate the formation of learning organizations. These activities take place at the individual, team, organizational, and societal learning levels. The action imperatives (Marsick & Watkins, 1999) are as follows:

Create continuous learning opportunities.

Promote inquiry and dialogue.

Encourage collaboration and team learning.

Establish systems to share and capture learning.

Empower people toward a collective vision.

Connect the organization to its environment.

Provide strategic leadership for learning. (p. 11)

It is essential that the leadership of the organization advance activities around these learning strategies.

## Chapter 2: UVM Context

After attending the first Conference for the Youth at Risk (YAR) Initiative held at the National 4-H Center, in Chevy Chase, MD in the fall of 1991, I was very engaged in this programming. It was personally and professionally rewarding. The objectives of Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) exemplified the intent of the Morrill Act in establishing the Cooperative Extension system to operate as the outreach arm of the Land-Grant institution. For the first time since joining University of Vermont (UVM) Extension in 1970, my work with CYFAR brought me in partnership with community stakeholders working together to address concerns that they identified for their CYFAR population. I brought my expertise as well as that of my UVM colleagues into dialogue with local residents and collaborating agencies for planning, implementing and evaluating CYFAR programming in targeted communities.

When one has such an exhilarating experience, one feels a passion for the work and my involvement grew to include serving on the national committee to design the Organizational Change Survey, the National Network for Collaboration, the planning committees for annual National CYFAR conferences, and the review committee for CYFAR proposals. My commitment and passion resulted in my becoming responsible for leadership of the CYFAR programming effort in Vermont. Part of that responsibility was the assessment of UVM Extension toward achievement of the CYFAR outcomes, including Organizational Change within UVM Extension's capacity to address this program audience. National CYFAR leadership did provide the instrument for assessment; however, the pathways to success were never clearly outlined for state

leaders to follow. The Organizational Change survey did not provide clear directional results.

Data from UVM Extension's 2004 Organizational Change Survey indicate that we have some strength among the components and some areas for further work. Respondents to the survey were UVM Extension professionals in Vermont working directly or indirectly with children, youth and families. Those positions working directly with CYFAR audiences include 4-H Youth Development program staff and regional faculty with Family and Consumer Sciences expertise. Supervisors and the extension editor would be examples of personnel working only indirectly with the CYFAR audiences. Of the 30 eligible respondents, 21 (70%) returned completed surveys. Many of the survey questions required a respondent to access what they believed was the current situation and what they thought was the ideal situation. A review of the gap that appears between the perceived current reality and the desired ideal condition may heighten our understanding and guide our future actions. Highlights of the survey include:

Common Vision: The results suggested that UVM Extension personnel may need more information on the state and national visions for the CYFAR program and that these visions should be congruent with one another. Furthermore, most Extension personnel felt that ideally Vermont should have a clear, long term commitment to the CYFAR national program and that Vermont needs to have a strategic plan in place for expanding and strengthening CYFAR programming in its counties. In addition, many respondents indicated that they did not have a clear understanding of Vermont's vision for CYFAR,

although almost three quarters reported that they personally work from a strategic plan that addresses children, youth and families at risk.

Reward Extension salaried and volunteer staff: The data indicated that UVM Extension is training and supporting staff for implementing programs that accomplish the CYFAR mission. However, the results showed that a large majority felt that ideally there should be greater recognition and support for staff, suggesting a need for further work in this area. Although many of the respondents had taken advantage of training during the past 12 months, more than half had participated in five of the 11 training topics, and five of the courses offered had less than 40% of respondents. While 60% reported that the training received was good or excellent, Extension personnel needed to be made more aware of training opportunities that are available. Data suggested that there may be a need to market Extension electronic resources better and improve usefulness of the web sites.

Extension professionals as critical resources: Results for this component suggested that UVM Extension professionals are knowledgeable about children, youth, families and community issues. Over 80% of respondents reported at least fair knowledge of principles of positive development, risk and resilience factors, programming for at-risk audiences, and evaluation. A majority indicated that they have good or excellent knowledge in these areas. Although 80% reported at least fair knowledge of obtaining resources and funds to support these programs and related policy and legislation, less than a quarter reported good or excellent knowledge. This suggested that further training may be needed in these areas. Results showed that almost 40% had been called upon at least monthly for their expertise, which indicated that they are being



recognized as critical resources in research and education for children, youth, family, and community issues.

Diversity, inclusiveness and pluralism: Results suggested that the UVM Extension system is active in incorporating diversity in planning, programming, and recruiting program participants, volunteers and staff. However, 57% agreed or strongly agreed that staff diversity is treated as critical in the current system, while 100% believed this should be the ideal. A majority of respondents worked extensively with non-traditional families; however, only a quarter were working extensively with people from diverse backgrounds.

Internal collaborations: The results showed a general trend that the most common types of working relationships with other Extension and university professionals are minimal. However, many reported that in an ideal system, these relationships should be more extensive. In addition, 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that working with other Extension professionals improved their programs for at-risk audiences. This suggests a need to build a greater support structure for collaboration among Extension professionals to the county and state level and in other program areas.

External collaborations: The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that collaboration with other community, state, and federal organizations enhanced their experience and credibility in work with at-risk audiences (95%) and such collaborations are worth the effort (85%). However, data indicated that current and ideal work with these organizations did not match, as most current relationships are minimal yet ideal ones are more extensive. Furthermore, half of respondents felt that they are not provided with the necessary resources (time and money) to engage in collaborative efforts, while

100% felt this should be ideal. Thus, work should also be done in this area to enhance collaboration among these organizations, possibly through the allocation of more resources.

When the 2004 responses were compared to the 1998 data to identify significant change, the results indicated virtually no change in existing capacity. For *Common Vision*, 10 questions were included in the construct measuring this component. Only two of the 10 items showed results approaching significant change ( $.05 < p < .10$ ). There was a positive change related to *UVM Extension professionals working from a strategic plan that addresses CYFAR issues*. A similar change was noted that *UVM Extension professionals get strong support from our campus-based faculty for CYFAR efforts*.

Results from analysis on component 2, *reward Extension salaried and volunteer staff*, 20 questions were included with the construct. Significant change ( $.01 < p < .05$ ) was noted to the negative in that fewer respondents indicated receiving training on *Collaboration, on use of electronic communication and on use of computers*. Significant change was apparent to the negative when asked about *sufficient training on use of computers*. Approaching significant change to the negative was also identified in the question on *frequency of accessing the CYFARnet website*. *Rating of staff development or training opportunities* also showed a negative turn with approaching significant decrease in sufficiency of offerings. The only change shown to the positive was at a value of approaching significant change in respondents indicating that they *received training on designing and implementing an evaluation process*.

Results from analysis on component 4 – diversity, inclusiveness, and pluralism – nine questions were included in the measurement construct and only one item showed

results approaching significant change, which was *identifying UVM Extension personnel's work with people from single-parent families*. For three of the six organizational change outcome components, *Extension professionals as critical resources, internal collaborations and external collaborations*, results showed responses maintained and no significant change occurred.

UVM Extension did conduct three waves of evaluation using the Organizational Change survey conducting analysis to identify statistically significant change. However, the surveys fell short of documenting a positive change in UVM Extension's ability to work more effectively with the target audience of children, youth and families at risk and the motivating conditions for this change.

When I conducted interviews during UVM Extension's second CYFAR grant in hopes of providing some clarity on results for the Organizational Change Outcome, it became clear that the program administrators lacked focus, supportive direction and a lack of understanding about the action research element to the project. The results of these evaluation steps, and the clear absence of organizational change, encouraged our program administration to identify a new set of organizational goals by which to assess CYFAR's progress. I believe an assessment tool more closely aligned with both the Action Learning model, as well as a comparison of capacity for organizational learning looking at potential CYFAR staff and UVM Extension staff, would provide information useful for my leadership role with CYFAR and as part of UVM Extension Leadership Team.

One cannot address the UVM Context for this study without mention of the vast changes in the UVM Extension Organization during this period. Staffing for CYFAR site

projects varied over the three funded programs, yet all staff worked within the Children, Youth and Families discipline with one exception that programmed in Community Development. UVM Extension faculty full-time positions were supported at .80 FTE beginning July 2001 (down from 1.0 FTE previously). Faculty are encouraged to seek grant funding to extend their appointments beyond the .80 FTE on base funds.

The *Budget and Administrative Plan FY04-FY06* states that, “As existing capacity to respond to clientele needs is constrained by an imbalance between expenses and revenues, it is imperative that Extension plan to use its resources to best serve the needs of the state, and simultaneously keep planned expenses at the same level as revenue projections” (p. 2). Two faculty positions supporting volunteer and staff development for 4-H/Youth Development were eliminated as prescribed by this document. One additional faculty position programming in Children, Youth and Families was redirected to address public policy and community leadership issues; however, this individual became the Interim Assistant Director and never filled the refocused position for the organization.

The *Budget and Administrative Plan FY06-FY08* outlined further reduction of two faculty positions in the area of Children, Youth and Families; one supporting after-school programming and non-profit board development, while the second focused on nutrition education. UVM Extension’s structure supported the “local 4-H Educators (program staff) for recruiting new 4-H volunteers, developing afterschool and other new programs, or for understanding local youth needs and interests...Having a local presence is critical to the long-term success of 4-H in Vermont” (p. 8). In addition to these five positions eliminated within the past four years, another 4-H/Youth Development faculty position was left vacant because of retirement. The human capital, defined by UVM Extension

faculty within the discipline of Children, Youth and Families, was reduced by six individuals totaling 4.80 FTE, plus the reduction of base funding support for the remaining faculty.

While UVM Extension faculty positions previously available to guide and support CYFAR programming efforts have declined dramatically over the past several years, the 4-H Educators have maintained a strong and vibrant program. Their efforts are focused on building and maintaining the traditional 4-H Club program. Some of these individuals served as staff for our most recent CYFAR project and brought new insight and energy to the programming.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### *Introduction*

It is appropriate to turn to the body of literature on organizational change in trying to assess the implementation and impact of the particular organizational changes identified in the six outcome statements. The academic fields of social psychology and sociology provide general theories of change in relation to individuals and groups, respectively (Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Popper & Lipshitz, 1998; Silverberg, Betts Huebner & Cota-Bobles, 1996; Starbuck, 1983). This work is relevant because system-wide changes in organizations depend in part on changes in the behavior of the individuals and groups within those systems. The unwillingness or inability to change by individual staff members constitutes a significant barrier to organizational change. Individuals also differ in their beliefs and attitudes about the possibility of change. Self-reported behaviors of staff members in community organizations are consistent with the beliefs they express about change, and it is not yet clear whether these beliefs in adults are malleable or whether they are relatively stable personality traits (Silverberg et al.). Other individual-level barriers to change can include habit, dependency, and fear of the unknown, along with security and economic factors (Rennenkamp & Gerhard, 1992).

Starbuck (1983) suggests that initial reported project results may present themselves to individuals as problems, successes, threats and opportunities that crystallize. Individuals perceive problems from early results as crystals in that they develop, as do crystals developing incrementally, with elements arrayed in logical congruent patterns. Rationalizations fill the logical gaps and problems continue to “grow perfect and hard like emeralds and rubies” (Starbuck, p. 95). As organization members

weigh the relative costs and rewards of choices open to them, they plot a course based on their reasoning. Perceived successes and opportunities can affect the information that forms the basis for rationalization filling the logical gaps. Consequently, crystallization may not result and with anxiety lessened, individuals are more likely to show receptivity for change. Emotions and reasoning are key components of how individuals experience change (Carnall, 1986; Schein, 1992; Starbuck). “People in organizations must not only choose actions, they must arouse motivation and elicit commitments to take actions; and group discussion facilitate both” (Starbuck, p. 98).

The process of conducting an evaluation can itself, under some circumstances, help to promote desired changes in organizational structure or culture (Forss, Cracknell, & Samset, 1994). Evaluation data perceived as disconfirming generate a level of anxiety and guilt in individuals. When such data are accompanied with a degree of psychological safety, the timing is right for a new vision and the beginning of the learning process (Ratner, 1997; Schein, 1992). People are only ready to pay attention when consciously or unconsciously they experience this anxiety because of the accumulation of disconfirming information. The challenge is to create structures that provide multiple, redundant opportunities for individuals to consider, at length, the issues and challenges of issues/concerns (Ratner). Systems thinking is a method for understanding various components that underlie complex situations (Luthy, 1993).

Interrelationships between components rather than cause-effect  
relationships between point of departure (status) and intended desired  
destination (new status), the result is a natural increase in product quality,

higher organizational productivity, and the emergence of greater leadership capability among staff at all levels. (Luthy, p. 5)

Helgesen (1995) suggests that considerable change can take place in an organization's operations without the basic cultural paradigm changing noticeably. The process of change can proceed slowly, in incremental stages, evolving, as individual tactical efforts proved successful. This approach is extremely important in order to counter resistance that may be anticipated. It is also helpful to move slowly in an effort to gather information related to what works and what does not as the organizations puts the new system into place. This author does offer caution in relation to changes for the efficiency of an organization, as the concept has experienced a value diminishing in post-industrial organizations.

At the group level, social exchange theory suggests that groups within an organization will respond to changes in terms of perceptions of power, advantage and disadvantage (Carnall, 1986). Group responses to change can be either passive or active, and may include resistance, opposition, acceptance, ritualistic response, acquiescence and leaving. Carnall suggests that organizations are effective in initiating change to the extent that advantages to some groups may be pursued without disadvantaging others. The applied disciplines of management and public administration provide more specific guidance in both assessing organizational effectiveness (Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis, & Cammann, 1983; Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980) and managing and evaluating organization transitions (Luthy, 1993).



### *Organizational Learning*

Early interest in the normative processes of organizational change and development has more recently given rise to studies of “organizational learning” (Kofman & Senge, 1993; Popper & Lipshitz, 1998; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). The extent to which an organization “learns” is thought to be related to both structural factors (mechanisms and procedures that allow organizations to systematically collect, disseminate, and use information) and cultural factors (including shared professional values, leadership, and vision). Organizations are able to gain knowledge/learn by synthesizing the knowledge of individual members (Forss et al., 1994; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

Forss and colleagues (1994) view organizational learning as a function of involvement and or communication. Learning by involvement is a process where knowledge is developed in partnership with external expertise. It may lead to rapid development of knowledge structures at the level of individuals and departments of the organization. Counterpoints for consideration include limited number of individuals involved and the high cost of the learning process. Learning by communication, however, is a passive mode where new knowledge is served from the center of the organization. Here learning occurs by reading or listening. The process is enhanced when the communication process is designed to be high quality, creative, fun/interesting and provocative. On the negative side, the amount of knowledge gained is small. In practice, these models occur in combination. Both must be addressed within the culture of the learning organization.

Elliott and Dweck (1988) posit a clear difference between performance goals and learning goals. Leaders initiating organizational change may profit from an understanding of this concept. Performance goals may cause individuals to seek to maintain positive judgments of their ability and to avoid negative judgments by seeking to validate their ability. When tasks are set in a framework of performance goals, they may render individuals vulnerable to helpless response in the face of failure and impaired performance. Reframing the goals as learning goals, individuals will seek to increase their ability or master new tasks regardless of perceived level of ability. Outcomes are drastically different. “The learning goal leads individuals to risk performance failure and the performance goal makes individuals sacrifice learning opportunities” (Elliott & Dweck, p. 7).

### *The Learning Organization*

The learning organization literature offers substantial information related to barriers of change. The concept of a learning organization recognizes that the capacity to learn both individually and collectively is a function of creating a learning culture that is different from the prevailing culture. In a learning culture, it is natural for humans to behave as proactive problem solvers and learners (Ratner, 1997; Schein, 1992). A complex blend of individualism and groupism is evident. Time orientation for learning is somewhere between near future and far future. Some individuals require more elbowroom to design and test new ideas assessing the congruence for their needs (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998). Learning by doing and posturing for consultants in joint experimentation provide opportunities to change. The learning culture supports this behavior by creating a multi-channel communication system that allows everyone to

connect to everyone else, thus establishing an organization that enables groups of individuals to learn from each other's experiences and expertise. Often feedback loops, critical to organizational learning, are broken, misplaced or nonexistent.

### *Dimensions of a Learning Organization*

The conceptual framework for this study adopts a model developed by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) describing organizational learning at the individual, team or group level, and organizational level (See Figure 1). In this model, demonstrable organizational learning stimulates organizational change. Marsick and Watkins (1999) identify seven action steps that they call action imperatives, that represent necessary structures for a learning organization. The seven imperatives include:

1. Create continuous learning opportunities.
2. Promote inquiry and dialogue.
3. Encourage collaboration and team learning.
4. Establish systems to share and capture learning.
5. Empower people toward a collective vision.
6. Connect the organization to its environment.
7. Provide strategic leadership for learning. (p. 11)

If an organization is to become a learning organization, these seven dimensions should be well represented in the culture of the organization. These steps are reviewed in some detail in the following pages.

### *Action Imperative: Create Continuous Learning Opportunities*

This imperative is described as "Learning designed into work so that people can learn on the job: Opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth"

(Watkins, Marsick, & O'Neil, 1997 p. 2). Confessor and Kops (1998) identify four types of workplace learning: formal, non-formal, informal and self directed. The self directed workplace learning places control of learning solely in the hands of the learner, control of both what to learn and the process of learning. The connection between self directed learning and the learning organization is identified as individuals who are encouraged to actively engage through open communication with managers to assume responsibility for their learning (Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell, 1991). Managers serve as facilitators for the learning process, communicating opportunities both planned and unplanned, and flexibly organizing work time to support individuals in their selected learning endeavors.

Related to this imperative is a consideration of learning choices and knowing how to seek needed information or skills. The collection of articles edited by Cheren (1987) focuses on the importance of active learning (learning by doing) which encompasses a set of skills for learning-to-learn or what is identified in this collection as learning management. The term "learning management" is a basic area of skills that all people need to know. The concept is labeled to draw a close connection to the well accepted concepts of time management and stress management, each associated with an identifiable skill set. In his chapter, Cheren suggests ways learning management competencies are developed as an integral part of training and development.

Success with learning how to learn in the workplace is accomplished by enhancing eight elements of the training and development routine that include:

1. design and implement a staff orientation program that enhances learning management competence;
2. build learning management skills development into all courses, workshops and programs;
3. design a learning resource center that enhances learning management competence;
4. develop self-instructional materials that enhance learning management competence;
5. develop field supervisory training in learning management enhancement and support;
6. develop and support problem-based learning modules;
7. broaden development project recordkeeping; and
8. develop a pervasive climate that fosters active and self-conscious learning throughout the organization. (Cheren, p. 23)

Organizations continually deal with change and need employees with learning management competence. This competence is enhanced through an organizational commitment to working toward the goal, addressing all eight areas with their employees.

*Action Imperative: Promote Inquiry and Dialogue*

“People gain productive reasoning skills to express their views, and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others; the culture supports questioning, feedback and experimentation” (Watkins et al., 1997 p. 2). Argyris (1997) presents two types of

reasoning: defensive and productive. Productive reasoning is characterized by three assumptions: (1) Reasoning or making inferences is a key activity in designing and implementing action; (2) learning to make inferences explicit and to test their validity in practice is important to effective action; and (3) designing activity to help self and others understand what is going on around them is central to initiating and sustaining action or change (p. 2). This type of reasoning requires people to assess their assumptions and judgment against changing conditions caused by the external environment.

Underlying the process of productive reasoning is the concept of causality. Probabilistic causality enhances learning in organizational practice through inquiry and dialogue around the probability that result B will occur following action A. Learning occurs when individuals can detect and correct an error in reasoning, a mismatch between the intent of an action, and the resulting consequence of that action. Learning behaviors encourage inquiry and dialogue.

Kurt Lewin, identified by some as the father of action research and pioneer in the field of organizational social psychology, outlined a three-phase model of organizational change: unfreeze, move or transition for change, and refreeze to stabilize or institutionalize the change (Goodstein & Burke, 1991). In an open-system, organizations are like living creatures. The unfreezing phase often requires an external catalyst to initiate change, all the while the organization, as a living organism, will resist and work to maintain the more comfortable steady state of status quo. Lewin suggests to deal with this resistance to change unblocking the present system must be addressed. Chaos and anger are expected and management needs to respond with open communication, engaging individuals in dialogue responding to questions and concerns. Openness in

response to questions may feel awkward and uncomfortable compared to the habitual response of top down directives.

Total Quality (TQ) tools for collecting and analyzing data about the organization/system number seven (Lawson & Shen, 1998) are designed to promote discussion and learning through analysis of data. The tools provide a basis for data-based problem solving. These TQ tools help to maintain the focus on continuous improvement in organizational performance over time.

*Action Imperative: Encourage Collaboration and Team Learning*

“Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking; groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded” (Watkins et al., 1997, p. 2). Lawson and Shen (1998) tell us that TQ teams spend most of their meeting time engaged in these activities: defining problems, identifying solutions and examining feedback on continuous improvement toward problem solving. These three activities are more clearly defined in the four essential components of the Deming Cycle central to TQ programs. First is the planning component when the current situation is assessed through observation and data collection. A plan for improvement is devised as the final stage to this component. The doing component is next and is initiated as an experiment or a trial state. The checking component follows where the implemented plan is assessed against the desired change and what further adjustments would enhance the improvement. At this stage, considerations are made for further adjustments to the plan that may yield further enhanced quality. In the action component, the final enhanced plan is implemented and expanded with the focus on standardization of the process.

The work of Argyris & Schön (1978) is the basis on which learning is defined and occurs under two conditions (Tsuchiya & Tsuchiya, 2000). First, it occurs when there is a match between the design for action and the resulting outcome (single-loop learning). Second, it occurs when a mismatch is identified between the designed action and outcome, and it is corrected (double-loop learning). Interpretative frameworks are developed through learning by experience and the efforts to make sense of outcomes that result from decision and actions. This framework development can be identified in a four step loop: 1) Knowledge Creation; 2) Decision/Action; 3) Interpretation; and 4) Development of Framework (Tsuchiya & Tsuchiya, p. 512). For double-loop learning to exist, the loop must be broken and new knowledge created that is free from the framework governing the organization. This new knowledge forms the basis for new decisions/actions and a new framework evolves from the interpretation of the outcomes.

Organizational learning occurs through individuals, but it is much more than their cumulative learning. It occurs only when the new knowledge and mental models of the individuals are shared in the organization. Policy exercise as described in the article is systems thinking and interactions of stakeholders within a simulated environment for double-loop organizational learning. Simulation techniques are a management tool proven instrumental in promoting the creation of new knowledge so necessary for injecting the catalyst to move the organization to double-loop learning. The policy exercise methodology is successful facilitating collaboration that engages a variety of stakeholders.

The action research model that Kurt Lewin (1948) proposed was based on the thought that individuals would be more committed and take action that is more effective



by actually working through the steps together. These steps include analyzing a collectively identified problem, collecting and reflecting on data, crafting possible solutions, putting a potential solution into practice, reflecting on the results, and revising the solution to be more effective with enhanced productive results. The focus is putting all the elements of effective problem solving into action with groups or teams, applying the concept of synergy to problem solving.

*Action Imperative: Establish Systems to Capture and Share Learning*

“Both high and low technology systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided and systems are maintained” (Watkins et al., 1997, p. 2). Edmondson’s (1999) study of 51 real work teams within a larger organization sought to understand the factors that enable team learning. Learning behavior (seeking feedback, sharing information, asking for help, talking about errors and experimenting) was a variable studied through qualitative and quantitative methods. Team psychological safety (rooted in the literature of organizational change) is described as “a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves” (Edmondson, p. 355). Both qualitative and quantitative results suggest that “team psychological safety mediates between team structures (context support and coaching) and the behavioral outcome of team learning” (p. 375).

Team psychological safety is so important to establish a risk-taking environment for team members to identify mistakes and ask reflective questions moving the team to a state of new knowledge. Meeting minutes must be complete, capturing the shared learning created from an error and the open dialogue that follows. If a safety net is not in

place, neither the sharing of individual mistakes in thinking or action nor the subsequent reflective dialogue that bring that knowledge into a context for greater understanding occur.

Gavin's (2000) definition of a learning organization clearly captures the essence of this imperative when he states, "A learning organization is an organization skilled in creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring, and retaining knowledge, and at purposefully modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights" (p. 11). Stages of learning are defined and include acquiring information (quality data collection); interpreting information (identifying the meaningful generalizations from the acquired information); and applying information (put the learning into action, practice new behaviors).

*Action Imperative: Empower People toward a Collective Vision*

"People are involved in setting, owning and implementing a joint vision; responsibility is distributed close to decision making to motivate people to learn that for which they are accountable" (Watkins et al., 1997, p. 2). Personal mastery is the practice of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively (Senge, 1990). Often individuals want to go beyond strengthening their own capabilities and engage in effort to increase the capabilities of others within the organization. Personal mastery implies that each has the responsibility to pursue learning opportunities to ensure personal development continues. Each has an obligation to observe how their personal mastery goals complement the goals of others and of the organization.

Senge (1990) encourages moving personal mastery to a discipline that we integrate into our life. Individuals who seek personal mastery have the “desire to create something new, something that has value and meaning to people” (p. 286). In doing so, individuals would continually clarify what is important to us and spend less time coping with problems along the way that may lead us from the important path. Continual learning is also key to personal mastery and it brings clarity to what we see as current reality. What is important here is keeping our eyes on the target or vision and learning or developing skills to bring that target into focus, making it more current reality than vision. Transformational leaders help to bring clarity and focus on the vision, then support and monitor action learning to move the organization toward that vision. Supporting, guiding and becoming a steward of others to bring them along toward the vision through individual personal mastery is the essence of transformational leadership.

*Action Imperative: Connect the Organization to its Environment*

“People are helped to see the impact of their work on the entire enterprise; people scan environment and use information to adjust work practices; organization is linked to community” (Watkins et al., 1997, p. 2). Senge (1990) describes the use of an exercise called *The Wall* to teach the concept of convergent (problems that have a solution) and divergent (problems that have no “correct” solution) problems. In the exercise, a wall is covered with blank paper and the group working together tries to identify all the feedback relationships with a particular problem. Those who rationalize the lack of insolvability for some problems may identify the exercise as pointless and a waste of time. Others focus on the time limitations of an exercise and are confident that with enough time the solution can be mapped out. Yet others recognize the problem as unsolvable and can

accept the divergent problem for what it is. The search becomes one for understanding instead of the right answer. We are free to pursue a creative process involving rational thinking and so much more.

When we look at the connections between the organization and its environment, several divergent problems surface such as work and family balance or job satisfaction or affirmative practices in determining what is equitable and fair. For these problems, there may be no correct solution. These problems, Senge (1990) suggested, are best addressed with openness and freedom. Agape love, defined by the Greeks, is the love that underlies openness and “has to do with intentions – commitment to serve one another and willingness to be vulnerable in the context of that service” (p. 285). This is the love that Robert Greenleaf defines fully in his writings on Servant Leadership. We commonly think of freedom as freedom *from* constraints, but Senge calls the reader to focus on the freedom *to* “create the results we truly desire” (p. 286).

*Action Imperative: Use Leaders Who Model and Support Learning at the Individual, Team and Organizational Level*

“Leaders model, champion and support learning; leadership uses learning strategically for business results” (Watkins et al., 1997, p. 2). Day (2001) draws a clear delineation between Leader Development and Leadership Development. The former focuses on an individual acquiring skills and knowledge (intrapersonal competence) to enhance their human capital. Leadership Development is built on a foundation of mutual trust and focuses on building interpersonal competence to enhance the social capital of the organization. Leader Development usually occurs in training and development sessions while Leadership Development is more effectively taught through action

learning or learning in the context of work tied to organizational strategic goals.

Learning organizations demonstrate a focus on both Leader Development and Leadership Development. These organizations encourage individuals to gain skills and knowledge about being a leader and create a safe environment for individuals to practice leadership in a real-life work context. In summary, “leadership is developed through the enactment of leadership” (Day, p. 605).

### *Summary*

The literature reviewed on change, organizational learning and finally the learning organizations enlightened this researcher’s understanding of the organizational change objective outlined in the six outcome statements for CYFAR programming. Marsick and Watkins (1999), in their summary of organizational learning, offer a model for grasping the scope of the literature, a framework for assessment and a foundation for a strategic plan to enhance organizational capacity for change. In short, this model operationalizes a broad literature base on organizational learning and relates that to the necessary conditions to stimulate change in an organization.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### *Research Design*

This study utilizes data gathered from the UVM Extension organization and specifically analyzes perceptions held by Extension professionals programming in the area of Children, Youth and Families. Perceptions of Extension personnel were measured using the *Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire* (DLOQ) a Likert scaled survey by Watkins and Marsick (1997). The survey instrument addressed each of the seven action imperatives as described by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) and Marsick and Watkins (1999). The survey had a total of 43 questions with the *continuous learning* action imperative having seven and all other action imperatives were addressed with six questions each (Table 1). Permission was sought from and granted by Dr. Karen Watkins to use the instrument with this research. The e-mail communication with Dr Watkins is included in Appendix C.

**Table 1: Action Imperative Level and Question Number in the DLOQ**

<u>Action Imperative</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Q numbers</u>
Create Continuous Learning Opportunities	Individual	1-7
Promote Inquiry and Dialogue	Individual	8-13
Encourage Collaboration and Team Learning	Team/Group	14-19
Establish Systems to Capture and Share Learning	Organization	20-25
Empower People Toward a Collective Vision	Organization	26-31
Connect the Organization to its Environment	Organization	32-37
Use Leaders Who Model Learning at the Individual, Team and Organizational Level	Organization	38-43

Six additional questions were included to gain demographic information of the participants including: (1) those who work for UVM Extension in base funded positions and those who did not; (2) extension region in which responded works; (3) number of years employed by the organization; (4) extension professionals programming in the area of Children, Youth and Families as well as those professionals supporting (i.e., program leader, communication specialists) and supervising the program group; (5) professional title of respondent; and (6) level of participation in CYFAR programming.

Ayers (2002) describes numerous studies using the *Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire* with their associated Cronbach Alpha reliability test scores (p. 58). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each of the action imperatives range from .70 to .90. The standard acceptance of reliability found in the literature is .70 (Nunnally, 1978); therefore, each author of the five separate studies (Table 2, p. 40) confirmed the DLOQ to be a reliable survey instrument.

#### *Sampling Method*

Resource limitations did not exist for conducting the on-line survey; therefore, the entire population was targeted for participation and sampling was not used. Surveying the entire population eliminated issues of sampling error. The survey population was identified using contact lists provided by the state office based on payroll records. UVM Extension contact list identified 93 individuals. Included within this survey population were 14 faculty and 16 staff who were identified as CYFAR staff, according to the Organizational Change survey participant definition. With this study, those responding as part of the CYFAR professionals self-selected as that status. Therefore, it was possible that the targeted sample of 30 individuals defined as CYFAR staff were in fact a much

smaller sample, as some may not have chosen to identify themselves with CYFAR. The targeted survey population for UVM Extension was 93 and within that population the researcher anticipated 30 CYFAR professionals.

**Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Estimates for Action Imperatives in the DLOQ**

Action Imperative	Yang, Watkins & Marsick 1998	Seldan 1998	McHargue 1999	Sta. Maria 2000	Hernandez 2000
Cont. Learning	.79	.70	.82	.76	.80
Dialogue and Inquiry	.85	.75	.86	.88	.81
Team Learning	.84	.84	.86	.86	.79
Embedded Systems	.80	.81	.82	.86	.81
Empowerment	.75	.79	.86	.87	.81
Connect to Environment	.82	.72	.84	.90	.80
Provide Leadership	.86	.82	.90	.89	.84



### *Data Collection*

The population for this study was the UVM Extension professionals, including those holding faculty, program staff and administrative staff positions. Following the Dillman (2000) *Total Design Method* of survey design, an e-mail was sent from Douglas Lantagne, Extension Director on September 12, 2006 announcing the questionnaire as well as providing documentation for both the purpose and procedure for the survey to potential respondents. This was followed with a second e-mail (September 20, 2006) from the researcher carrying the URL link to the electronic survey along with a review of propose and procedure (Appendix B). All efforts were in place to protect the anonymity of the respondents and their personal information. As required by UVM, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the survey population and the survey instrument. The IRB approval letter appears in Appendix A along with survey protocol and active consent.

The DLOQ took the form of a web-based survey incorporating the Perseus system available through UVM. Ease of survey completion was imperative to ensure the largest response rate possible. Responses were stored in a Perseus data base file, which was password protected and accessible only by the researcher through UVM Perseus management. Four weeks following the initial request for participation, a third e-mail was sent (October 16, 2006) thanking those who did respond and offering a second request for their participation (Appendix D). Response rate of 42% (n=39) was achieved between survey invitation issued on September 20, 2006 and the second request on October 16, 2006; 34% (n=32) response rate was achieved within a week of the invitation to participate. Response rate rose to 59% (n=55) by the target survey close date of October 30, 2006 announced in the October 16<sup>th</sup> request.

In an attempt to gather a few additional respondents, a follow-up request (Appendix E) was issued on December 4, 2006. Response rate reached 68% (n=63) by survey closing on December 15, 2006. A response rate close to 47%, as identified in the literature (Dillman, 2000), was anticipated.

### *Analysis of Data*

Initial analysis included the total number of respondents, the range of response scores, maximum and minimum scores from the respondents, as well as mean, median, mode and standard deviation of all the respondents for each dimension imperative. Where a respondent did not answer one or more of the questions within a dimension construct, their data was removed from consideration for that dimension at this level of analysis. Response frequency analysis was used to identify areas of weakness for each question within the dimensions. The researcher noted questions within the seven dimensions where the frequency rate of 25% for responses of two or lower on the Likert scales where a response of 1 was “almost never” and 6 was “almost always”. These questions established the areas of weakness addressed in the strategic plan designed to enhance UVM Extension CYFAR professionals as a learning organization.

The Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to evaluate whether the medians on a test variable differ significantly between groups within the independent variables. Several tests were run to thoroughly investigate each categorical variable. It was applied to determine which of the dimension scores were significantly different by the respondents’ years in the organization or by the level of CYFAR participation.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Several limitations related to subjectivity must be addressed as the researcher approached this study. These included power, personal interest, voice and politics, and the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Since 1992, I have held a leadership position with the CYFAR program in the state and on national committees. During that time, I authored and served as Principle Investigator/Project Director for 16 grants, collaborating on another four proposals, bringing over \$1.6 million of support for UVM Extension programming to address CYFAR. Money almost always aligns with power and it is certainly true in a university department plagued with red ink. Clearly, I am associated with the CYFAR programming efforts and the money that it represents. Simultaneously, it has been my practice to bring along others who were interested in programming with this target audience, following their lead related to staff and project site location. I had friends related to the power and did my best to honor that friendship.

When I speak of personal interest, I must address the emotions I feel when I reflect on my work with CYFAR and the questions that drove this research. I remember beginning in 1992 and realizing that since starting my career with UVM Extension in 1970, CYFAR programming was the real work that I anticipated in my undergraduate coursework. It was important work to address the issue of children, youth and families at risk as a Vermont problem evident in Vermont communities. This was particularly the case in the communities located in the Northeast Kingdom (northeastern three counties of greatest need and fewest resource providers) and was where our programming began. I recall vividly a strategic planning meeting of UVM Extension in those early years of CYFAR. As a leader, I took the floor hoping to influence the group decision to continue

our program focus on Youth at Risk (initial focus of the CYFAR Program). There were numerous programming paths presented so the competition was keen. I was victorious and the vote was in the affirmative to continue our effort into the future. My passion is very clearly embraced in CYFAR work.

Having such strong feelings for this work, a consideration of voice and politics was needed. Since beginning my CYFAR work, I moved from a faculty position to Administration through an open search process. Most recently, I completed another open search to become Regional Director for a larger six county region. During our CYFAR programming, we targeted 14 communities for programming and 10 (71.5%) were in counties where I served as Regional Director as well as Project Director for CYFAR. The *voice* I used in working with project staff carried some additional political influence when conversing with staff within my administrative region. While sitting in conference with other Regional Directors as part of the administrative team, I needed to often clarify if I was speaking as the Regional Director or CYFAR Project Director. Certainly, the move to UVM Extension administrative role enhanced my political position with CYFAR leadership nationally, engaging the Extension Director in dialogue and welding stronger state support for CYFAR programming.

Another limitation related to subjectivity was the researcher as the researched. This was a consideration for the survey participants who were CYFAR project staff as well as the larger pool of participants, including faculty and staff within my administrative region. I addressed this limitation for the CYFAR participants in statements above. The regional personnel were part of a comparative group established as all UVM Extension faculty and staff. With either group of survey participants, I was

the researcher and a part of the researched group of participants. I have a keen interest in the survey responses and results. The concern is in my presentation of the survey results. Though the research was with an identified group that I needed to understand clearly, the presentation is on this identified group, of which I am an active member. I kept a perspective conducting the research, limiting subjectivity as humanly possible and then owning the results (positive and negative) as part of what I created.

Survey methodology also needed to be addressed in consideration of research limitations. This study employed a non-randomized sample. Therefore, only generalizations about the CYFAR and UVM Extension respondents were reported. The sample was only as large as its employees. UVM Extension Financial Operations Manager identified 72 people on base funds working in Extension regions and on campus, along with 21 people holding positions that are soft funded. Included within this employee pool were 14 faculty and 16 staff who were identified as CYFAR staff according to the Organizational Change survey participant definition. With this study, those responding as part of the CYFAR participants self selected as that status. Therefore, it was possible that the targeted sample of 30 individuals defined as CYFAR staff were in fact a much smaller sample as some did not choose to identify themselves as such. The non-randomized sample for UVM Extension was 93 and for CYFAR 30. Our Organizational Change surveys had a response rate of about 70%. That was a mail survey with reminder messages sent to those not responding. This study used an on-line survey with reminder messages sent to all potential respondents through the listserv, as the researcher was not be able to identify non-respondents. A response rate close to 47%, as identified in the literature was anticipated (Dillman, 2000).

### *Summary*

In a learning organization as conceived by Watkins and Marsick (1993), individuals behave as proactive problem solvers and learners. Developing learning goals support individuals seeking to increase their ability to master new tasks regardless of their perceived level of ability. As the current leader of UVM Extension's Children, Youth and Families at Risk programming efforts, the information gained related to strengths among the action imperatives assisted me in facilitating our development of a learning organization among these individuals. Currently these strengths are not identified. The actions that I may institute would only be based on a personal intuition and the few areas of significant change that emerged for analysis of the Organizational Change survey data. This study greatly enhanced my opportunity to create and initiate a plan of action to move UVM Extension's CYFAR efforts toward success in reaching the six components outlined by the Organizational Change Outcome.

## Chapter 5: Research Findings

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to understand how UVM Extension Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) professionals perceive their organizations as a learning organization. In order to guide the study, three research questions were proposed:

1. To what extent do the UVM Extension CYFAR professionals perceive their organization as a learning organization in relation to Watkins and Marsick's (1993) seven dimensions of the learning organization?
2. To what extent does select organization information such as office location, number of years employed in organization, employee title and level of participation in CYFAR efforts independently explain observed variance in Watkins and Marsick's seven dimensions of the learning organization?
3. To what degree does the UVM Extension, and in particular CYFAR personnel, perceive to demonstrate the principles of components of what we now call a learning organization?

The Cronbach Alpha coefficients were calculated using SPSS for each of the dimensions in the survey and ranged from .83 to .93. The standard acceptance of reliability found in the literature is .70; therefore reaffirming the reliability of the DLOQ instrument. Table 3 shows a comparison of Cronbach Alpha reliability scores for this study with other studies reflected in the Ayers (2002) study.

**Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Estimates for Dimension in the DLOQ**

Action Imperative	Yang, Watkins & Marsick 1998	Rowe 2006	McHargue 1999	Sta. Maria 2000	Hernandez 2000
Cont. Learning	.79	.83	.82	.76	.80
Dialogue and Inquiry	.85	.88	.86	.88	.81
Team Learning	.84	.88	.86	.86	.79
Embedded Systems	.80	.86	.82	.86	.81
Empowerment	.75	.86	.86	.87	.81
Connect to Environment	.82	.87	.84	.90	.80
Provide Leadership	.86	.93	.90	.89	.84

*Results: Research Question #1*

A key way that extension professionals identify with Children, Youth and Families (CYF) programming is the degree to which they work with at risk audiences. Of the 63 surveyed UVM Extension professionals responding, 42 (67%) identified themselves as UVM Extension professionals who program at some level for children, youth and families at risk. The researcher anticipated that 30 UVM Extension professionals would identify themselves as working in the National Program area of CYFAR based on the criteria used to identify contacts for the previous Organizational



Change surveys. While 40 (63%) identified themselves as programming in the area of CYF, 42 (67%) of respondents indicated that they program at least *some of the time* (less than 25% FTE) in the area of CYFAR. With these findings, it appears that the capacity within UVM Extension is larger than the immediate group trained to address children, youth and families.

The group of respondents identifying themselves as programming at least some of the time in the area of CYFAR (n=42) are the respondent responses considered in analysis for Research Question #1: to what extent do the UVM Extension CYFAR professionals perceive their organization as a learning organization in relation to Watkins and Marsick's (1993) seven dimensions of the learning organization, focusing on relationships between seven dimensions of the learning organization and the independent variable for the level of involvement in CYFAR programming. Table 4 provides descriptive data of the CYFAR respondents, including the number, maximum and minimum scores, mean, and standard deviation for each dimension of a learning organization addressed by the 43-item Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that UVM Extension CYFAR professionals would score higher, on average, than non-CYFAR UVM Extension professionals for the seven dimensions of a learning organization. The results of the test were not in the expected direction and not significant.

**Table 4: Dimensions Descriptive Data for CYFAR Respondents**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min. Score</b>	<b>Max. Score</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Continuous Learning	41	16	40	26.34	5.80
Inquiry & Dialogue	42	10	32	21.19	5.36
Team Learning	40	10	33	21.15	5.21
Systems to Capture Learning	39	8	31	17.97	5.29
Empowerment	40	9	33	20.95	5.76
Connect to Environment	41	12	36	22.71	5.88
Provide Ldship	42	10	34	23.45	6.65

In comparison with the Agriculture Business Counselors group of extension professionals studied by Ayers (2002), UVM Extension CYFAR professionals' mean scores are slightly less for all dimensions. The study samples were of similar size with the Ayers study reporting on 46 respondents and UVM Extension CYFAR respondents totaling 42. Table 5 displays the mean scores for all dimensions from the Ayers study with this current study. The first data column of the table shows the maximum score possible for each of the DLOQ seven dimensions and serves as the target for a successful learning organization. The second and third columns show mean scores for the dimensions and show percentage of the maximum possible score.

Organizational learning is transformational learning and helps organizations understand and overcome the changes impacting them. If an organization is to become a

learning organization, these seven dimensions should be well represented in the culture of the organization. In providing leadership to move the UVM Extension CYFAR professionals forward as a learning organization, the focus would be on celebrating success with dimensions well represented, building on that success while creating a strategic plan to establish further success for the dimensions less well represented.

**Table 5: Dimension Mean Scores of Ayers versus UVM Extension CYFAR**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Maximum Scores Possible</b>	<b>Mean Scores for Ayers study</b>	<b>Mean Scores for UVM Ext CYFAR</b>
Continuous Learning	42	70% (29.35)	63% (26.34)
Inquiry & Dialogue	36	71% (25.49)	59% (21.19)
Team Learning	36	73% (26.24)	58% (21.15)
Systems to Capture Learning	36	66% (23.78)	50% (17.97)
Empowerment	36	69% (24.83)	58% (20.95)
Connect to Environment	36	71% (25.56)	63% (22.71)
Provide Leadership	36	72% (25.98)	65% (23.45)

*Results: Research Question #2*

In addition to the 43-item DLOQ, survey respondents addressed six organizational demographic questions related to office location, number of years employed in organization, source of salary/wage funding, programming for CYF, employee title and level of participation in CYFAR. Analysis was conducted to determine what, if any, measures of organizational demographics are associated with the tenets of organizational learning. Since there is no statistically significant difference in

responses between CYFAR (n=42) and non-CYFAR (n=21) respondents as reported earlier, analysis of the organizational demographics was conducted using all survey respondents (n=63).

When considering the demographic of office location, the researcher was very interested in comparison between respondents from the Central/Northeast Region, where she provided leadership as Regional Director, compared to respondents in other locations. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that UVM Extension professionals responding from the Central/Northeast region would score higher, on the average, than respondents in the other three locations. The results of the test were as expected and significant,  $z \geq -2.03$ ,  $p < .05$  for three of the seven dimensions. Table 6 shows the test results on the seven dimensions for the two groups.

**Table 6: Analysis of Central/Northeast Region versus Other Office Locations**  
**Test Statistics(a)**

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Continuous Learning	246	912	-2.816	<b>0.005</b>
Inquiry and Dialog	307	973	-1.892	0.059
Team Learning	283.5	949.5	-2.033	<b>0.042</b>
Systems to Capture Learning	212.5	842.5	-3.027	<b>0.002</b>
Empowerment	309	939	-1.49	0.136
Connect to Environment	338	968	-1.269	0.205
Provide Leadership	333.5	1036.5	-1.635	0.102

a Grouping Variable: Central/Northeast Region is 1

The researcher took a closer look at the frequency scores for individual questions within each of the three dimensions where statistical significance was noted including: *Continuous Learning*, *Team Learning* and *Systems to Capture Learning*. Table 7 shows the questions in these dimensions where Central/Northeast response frequency was 25% or more for scores of 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always) as well as frequency percentage for the total respondent sample.

**Table 7: Questions Where Central/Northeast Response Frequency was 25% or More for Scores 2 or Lower**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Sample Frequency</b>	<b>Question and Subset Frequency</b>
Continuous Learning	33.3%	1. In my organization, people openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them. (25.0%)
Team Learning	38.1%	19. In my organization, teams/groups are confident that the organization will act on their recommendations. (33.3%)
Systems to Capture Learning	59.0%	22. My organization maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills. (39.1%)
	42.9%	24. My organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees. (25.0%)

The campus community is located in very close geographical proximity compared to the regional offices. It was expected that on-campus respondents may have slightly higher response mean scores. An analysis was conducted with the on-campus

respondents (n=23) compared to all other respondents. Again, the Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to evaluate if on-campus respondents would score higher, on the average, than respondents from all other locations on the seven dimensions of a learning organization. The results were significant,  $z = -2.10$ ,  $p < .05$  (.036) for one dimension, *system to capture learning*. Table 8 shows the questions where there is frequency of 25% or more for responses of 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always).

**Table 8: Questions Where Campus Response Frequency was 25% or more for Scores 2 or Lower**

Dimension	Sample Frequency	Question and Subset Frequency
System to Capture Learning	20.6%	20. My organization uses two-way communication on a regular basis, such as suggestion systems, electronic bulletin boards, or town hall/open meetings. (26.1%)
	14.5%	21. My organization enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily. (26.1%)
	59.0%	22. My organization maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills. (72.7%)
	35.6%	23. My organization creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance. (50.0%)
	42.9%	24. My organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees. (60.9%)
	41.9%	25. My organization measures the results of the time and resources spent on training. (56.5%)

Analysis of the responses compared to the years of service or tenure variable showed that the newest members of the UVM Extension professional community (less than five years) provided responses that were statistically significant for four of the seven dimensions of a learning organization. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was conducted to evaluate the idea that those new to the UVM Extension professionals community and therefore less affected by the culture created around organizational learning would score higher, on the average, than those with longer tenure on the dimensions of a learning organization. The results of the test were to some extent in the expected direction and significant,  $z \geq -2.87$ ,  $p < .05$ . Table 9 shows analysis conducted.

**Table 9: Analysis of 5 Years of Less of Service versus other Service Tenures**  
**Test Statistics(a)**

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)
Continuous Learning	190.5	1225.5	-2.518	<b>0.012</b>
Inquiry and Dialog	178.5	1259.5	-2.795	<b>0.005</b>
Team Learning	189	122.4	-1.934	0.053
Systems to Capture Learning	264.5	1254.5	-1.143	0.253
Empowerment	158	1239	-2.874	<b>0.004</b>
Connect to Environment	231.5	1312.5	-1.586	0.113
Provide Leadership	219.5	1300.5	-2.106	<b>0.035</b>

a Grouping Variable: under 5 years and other

In review of the subset of respondents indicating less than five years of tenure with UVM Extension, the researcher identified all questions within the four dimensions where statistical significant difference was noted and had a response frequency of less than 25% for scores of 2 or less. All questions where this subset frequency of response was 25% or more for scores of 2 or lower, occurred within the dimensions of *Team Learning*, *System to Capture Learning*, and *Connect to Environment* (see Table 10).

**Table 10: UVM Extension Professionals with less than 5 Years Service**

Dimension	Sample Frequency	Question and Subset Frequency
Team Learning	38.1%	19. In my organization, teams/groups are confident that the organization will act on their recommendations. (26.7%)
System to Capture Learning	59.0%	22. My organization maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills. (53.3%)
	35.0%	23. My organization creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance. (26.7%)
	42.9%	24. My organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees. (33.3%)
	41.9%	25. My organization measures the results of the time and resources spent on training. (33.3%)
Connect to Environment	38.1%	35. My organization considers the impact of decisions on employee morale. (26.7%)



The researcher was interested to see if there was an effect on mean score based on position title. The Mann-Whitney *U* test was replicated for each of the three position titles (Administrative Staff, Faculty and Program Staff) to evaluate if one segment of the respondents based on position title would score higher, on the average, than the respondents of the other two titles combined. The results of the tests showed no statistically significant difference in mean scores between or among the three position title groups. Similarly, when applying the Mann-Whitney *U* test to independent variables related to level of participation in CYFAR or source of salary/wage funding, no statistically significant difference in mean scores was indicated.

### *Results: Research Question #3*

Taking a closer look at the mean scores within each dimension of a learning organization, the researcher gains a deeper understanding of where to begin with the planning process. The third research question – to what degree does UVM Extension, and in particular CYFAR professionals, perceive to demonstrate the principles of components, of what we now call a learning organization – focused attention on the tenets within each dimension where UVM Extension CYFAR professionals scored poorly. Respondents were asked to rate their responses using a six point scale, 1 being almost never and 6 being almost always. Table 11 shows the questions in each dimension where 25% or more of respondents scored the question at 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). Since there was no statistically significant difference in responses of CYFAR and non- CYFAR UVM Extension professionals, further analysis were not conducted with the subset groups. Instead, the UVM Extension professionals (n=63) total respondent pool was used for analysis.

**Table 11: Questions Where 25% Scored 2 or Lower**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Question and Frequency</b>
Continuous Learning	1. In my organization, people openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them. (33.3%)
Inquiry & Dialogue	
Team Learning	19. In my organization, teams/groups are confident that the organization will act on their recommendations. (38.1%)
Systems to Capture Learning	22. My organization maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills. (59.0%)  23. My organization creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance. (35.0%)  24. My organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees. (42.9%)  25. My organization measures the results of the time and resources spent on training. (41.9%)
Empowerment	26. My organization recognizes people for taking initiative. (25.4%)  31. My organization builds alignment of visions across different levels and work groups. (32.3%)
Connect to Environment	33. My organization encourages people to think from a global perspective. (30.6%)  35. My organization considers the impact of decisions on employee morale. (38.1%)
Provide Leadership	41. In my organization, leaders mentor and coach those they lead. (28.6%)

The analysis of respondents to the DLOQ provided the researcher with information about how they perceived the organization, focusing on how well individuals and teams within the organization, and the organization as a whole, have developed the capacity for learning.

### *Summary of Results*

The purpose of this study was to understand how UVM Extension CYFAR professionals perceive their organizations as a learning organization. Results, based on the use of *Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire* designed to Watkins and Marsick's (1993) conceptual framework for a learning organization, indicated that UVM Extension CYFAR professionals perceive their organization much as do other UVM Extension professionals. Six of the seven dimensions identified in the framework have tenets where the respondents scored poorly, frequency rates at 25% or higher for scores of 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). These tenets are addressed fully with a strategic plan in the following chapter. Organizational demographic measures of significance included:

- Frequency rates on scores of 2 or lower were higher for On-Campus location than those of the total sample for all questions in the dimension of *System to Capture Learning*;
- Frequency rates on scores of 2 or lower were lower for Central/Northeast Region location respondents than those of the total sample (selected questions in dimensions of *Continuous Learning*, *Team Learning*, and *System to Capture Learning*); and

- Frequency rates on scores of 2 or lower were lower for less than five years service respondents than those of the total sample (selected questions in dimensions of *Team Learning*, *System to Capture Learning*, and *Connect to Environment*).

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

### *Introduction*

The survey results provide a baseline to identify strengths as well as areas of concern for UVM Extension professionals as a learning organization. As an individual providing leadership for Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) programming, implications for further efforts will be focused on my work in building a learning organization within this programming area. Organizational learning is transformational learning and helps organizations understand and overcome the changes impacting them. If our CYFAR professionals are to become a learning organization, the seven dimensions should be well instituted in the culture.

We will celebrate the success related to strengths within the Inquiry & Dialogue dimension where 76% or more of the respondents scored questions 8-13 at 3 or above (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). Some particular statements to note include: In my organization, people treat each other with respect (average score of 4.14). To a lesser extent but still within the averages of 3.63 and 3.13 are statements related to people spending time building trust with each other, being encouraged to ask “why” regardless of rank, listening to others’ views before speaking, asking what others think, and giving open and honest feedback to each other.

The areas of concern within the other six dimensions are addressed, first looking at those elements where 25% or more of respondents scored the questions at 2 or lower (Table 11, p. 58). Building and sculpting a learning organization will take deliberate action and monitoring of results. Replication of the survey would be recommended within the next two years.

## *Conclusions*

### *Continuous Learning*

The Edmondson study (1999) of 51 real work teams within a larger organization sought to understand the factors that enable team learning. Learning behavior (seeking feedback, sharing information, asking for help, talking about errors and experimenting) was a variable studied through qualitative and quantitative methods. Team psychological safety is described as “a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 355). Team psychological safety is so important in establishing a risk-taking environment for team members to identify mistakes and to ask reflective questions moving the team to a state of new knowledge. Meeting minutes must be complete, capturing the shared learning resulting from an error and the open dialogue that follows. In Central/Northeast Region, 33.3% of the respondents scored a 2 or lower on the statement that people openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them (*Continuous Learning* dimension). Effort must be made to establish the team psychological safety net offering a solid platform for open discussion of mistakes/errors so learning can take place and new knowledge created. If the safety net is not in place, neither the sharing of individual mistakes in thinking or action nor the subsequent reflective dialogue that brings that knowledge into a context for greater understanding will occur.

### *Team Learning*

Team psychological safety is key to encouraging collaboration and team learning. Lawson and Shen (1998) present the four essential components of the Deming Cycle central to Total Quality programs. The first component of this Cycle is *planning* where

the current situation is assessed through observation and data collection. A plan for improvement is devised followed by the *doing* component where the plan is initiated as an experiment or pilot stage. The *checking* component follows where the implementation plan is assessed against the desired change and further adjustments are identified that may yield further enhanced quality. In the *action* component, the final enhanced plan is implemented and expanded with the focus on standardization of the process.

The steps for the action research model proposed by Kurt Lewin (1948) are similar to the Deming Cycle focusing on effective problem solving. The steps involved in analyzing a collectively identified problem include: collecting and reflecting on data; crafting possible solutions; putting a potential solution into practice; reflecting on the results; and revising the solution to be more effective with enhanced productive results. In response to the statement, as part of the *Team Learning* dimension – in my organization, teams/groups are confident that the organization will act on their recommendations – 38.1% responded with a 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). This researcher needs to ensure that when teams/groups of CYFAR professionals are engaged in problem solving, that all phases of the cycle or action research model are completed. When the doing and/or action steps do not occur after conscientious effort at each step along the problem solving process, the organization loses a real opportunity to function as a learning organization both in team learning and in capturing learning for our future use.

#### *Systems to Capture Learning*

The dimension most clearly identified for strengthening is *Systems to Capture Learning*. Within the six questions designed to measure the dimension, frequency data

shows that four of these had a frequency response rate of 25% or higher for a score of 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). Stages of learning are defined by Gavin (2000) and include acquiring information (quality data collection); interpreting information (identifying the meaningful generalizations from the acquired information); and applying information (put the learning into action, practice new behaviors). CYFAR professionals' learning is diminished with failure to fully achieve at each stage. When asked to assess the statement, my organization maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills, 59% responded with a score of 2 or lower. This statement represents an example of a missed opportunity for *acquiring information* that would be very valuable to the organization.

Interpreting information and applying information, the second and third stages, are represented with the statement, my organization creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance, where 35% of respondents scored the statement as a 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). The statement, my organization measures the results of the time and resources spent on training, is also a reflection of these stages. For this latter statement, 41.9% scored it as a 2 or lower. The final stage of applying information is somewhat represented by the statement, my organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees, when 42.9% scored the statement at a 2 or lower. Part of applying information is sharing the results for others to learn or use as data for continued learning.

### *Empowerment*

Watkins and Marsick (1993) define the term empowerment as “a new term for employee involvement, which dates back to earlier participative management schemes; it



is often hailed but seldom practiced” (p. 196). When people in the organization perceive an intolerable situation, they feel confident to take action to remedy it and sense a responsibility and/or recognition for their action. Feeling confident to take the initiative to address such negative situations is key to empowerment. When responding to the statement, my organization recognizes people for taking initiative, 25.4% scored the statement a 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). Watkins & Marsick continue to clarify the concept of empowerment by saying,

Empowerment is not a one-shot event. It comes about by little day-to-day interactions among individuals, teams, and departments that are characterized by mutual respect, a spirit of collaboration and inquiry, honesty, and climate of safety and trust. (p. 216)

Empowering people toward a collective vision requires involvement of all employees across the organization. When asked to respond to the statement, my organization builds alignment of visions across different levels and work group, 32.3% scored at a 2 or lower. There is a need to focus on engaging all CYFAR professional in dialogue, decisions and action; empowering them to assume responsibility and recognition for tackling the tough situations. Also, instilling a spirit of collaboration and building the learning organization together is needed. What is important here is keeping our eyes on the target or vision and learning or developing skills to bring that target into focus, making it a more current reality than vision. For Watkins and Marsick (1993), this dimension of *empowerment* is the most important of the dimensions for designing a learning organization.

### *Connect to Environment*

When we look at the connections between the organization and its environment, several divergent problems surface, like work and family balance, job satisfaction or affirmative practices in determining what is equitable and fair. For these problems, there may not be a correct solution. These problems, Senge (1990) suggests, are best addressed with openness and freedom. Agape love is the love that underlies openness and “has to do with intentions – commitment to serve one another and willingness to be vulnerable in the context of that service” (p. 285). This commitment to serve others is reflected in the two statements within the Connect to Environment dimension where responses were 25% or higher with a score of 2 or less (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always). The first of these statements, my organization encourages people to think from a global perspective, 30.6% scored the statement at 2 or lower. Second is, my organization considers impact of decision on employee morale, 38.1% scored at 2 or lower.

The issue targeted with the organization viewed by professionals as one that considers the impact of decisions on employee morale is closely linked with the elements of an organization exhibiting strength with the *empowerment* dimension. If CYFAR professionals worked within a culture which breeds mutual respect, a spirit of collaboration, and a climate of safety and trust, we would not make decisions that negatively affected morale. Decisions would be made embedded in a participatory, democratic culture. A focus on establishing this culture for CYFAR professionals would go a long way in moving us toward a true learning organization. Such a democratic culture would enhance the openness and freedom that Senge (1990) refers to, which

would in turn stimulate the organization to connect more fully with the environment and a global perspective of that environment. That Agape love can move the organization from a search for the right answer to a freedom in pursuing a process involving creative problem solving and rational thinking.

### *Provide Leadership*

Day (2001) shares that leadership development is built on a foundation of mutual trust and intent on building interpersonal competence to enhance the social capital of the organization. It is effectively taught through action learning or learning in the context of work tied to organizational strategic goals. Organizational leaders create a safe environment for individuals to practice leadership in a real-life work context. Learning organizations encourage individuals to gain skills and knowledge about being a leader, expanding their intrapersonal competence to enhance their human capital. The one statement within the six used to assess this dimension, in the DLOQ where 25% or more respondents scored it as a 2 or lower, relates strongly to the supportive learning environment which Day presents. The statement, in my organization, leaders mentor and coach those they lead, 28.6% scored the statement 2 or lower (1 being almost never and 6 being almost always).

The Andragogical Model for contemporary learning as described by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) in the sixth edition of *The Adult Learner* is oriented to the process of learning and outlines eight elements of a learning environment where leaders establish a mentoring or coaching relationship with the learner. UVM Extension's Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship project is one clear example for this model. Apprentices are provided with a Master Practitioner in the field of Youth Development.

The Master Practitioner is defined as an experienced and trusted advisor committed to helping the apprentice as a mentor. He or she offers support and assistance in the development of the Apprentice's career in youth development, and provides experience-based advice and resources to establish an on-going relationship with the Apprentice. The topic of leadership development can be addressed in much the same way within a less formal structure. This is the path I would follow in building leadership development among CYFAR professionals.

### *Implications*

Watkins and Marsick (1993) identify three barriers that individuals, teams and organizations face when learning which include truncated learning, learned helplessness and tunnel vision. They explain truncated learning as when "Most organizations are haunted by the ghosts of learning efforts that never really took root because they were interrupted or only partially implemented" (p. 240). The leadership of CYFAR needs to go beyond sharing the vision for change in words alone. It must strive to empower CYFAR professionals to explore and experience the vision. Within the structure of learning goals, not performance goals, these professionals are provided a safety net to make and learn from mistakes. New learning and knowledge bring the organization closer to the shared vision. Sometimes leadership loses faith that the organization can achieve this new vision with new initiatives, drops the focus on them and shifts effort in another direction toward yet another initiative to bring about an organizational change. Here the truncated learning leads to the second barrier of learned helplessness where "people learn to ignore new initiatives if they think the initiative will disappear" (p. 242).

This learned helplessness does damage to the organization by undermining motivation and preventing the attention necessary to create learning opportunities that would empower individuals, but instead, support passive behavior. Passivity is enhanced as individuals are socialized into roles within the organization. The environment and history of the organization provide indicators to individuals about expectation for their actions. Assumptions are made about how the organization will respond to their actions and play a strong role influencing behavior. If the organization initiates change, but lacks follow-through by designing a supportive environment, individuals learn to be helpless. They do not feel empowered to learn the skills and practices that will enhance the success of new initiatives. The leadership for CYFAR professionals must create a supportive environment modeling active participation in a learning culture where learning becomes the focus supported through training, realignment of reward systems and recreating the work.

The third barrier addressed by Watkins and Marsick (1993) is that of tunnel vision. “Tunnel vision is an inability to see oneself and a situation from a systems point of view and to act accordingly” (p. 246). A learning organization encourages individuals and teams to thoroughly investigate problems, scoping the issue from multiple perspectives. Risk-taking cultures promote a broadening of perspective most needed to address the barrier of tunnel vision. Such a culture would embrace a more collaborative problem solving behavior needed to foster systems thinking. The leadership of CYFAR professionals must create a culture where decision making is decentralized and aligned with the vision’s big picture. Shared knowledge, as well as a shared vision, along with a supportive environment needs to be in place for us to make quality decision.

### *Future Research*

The authors of the *Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire* (Watkins & Marsick, 1997) recommend replication of the survey every 18 to 24 months to track progress toward building a Learning Organization. In conversation with UVM Extension leadership, a determination will be made whether the questionnaire is administered system wide or only with CYFAR professionals in the future.

### *Summary*

CYFAR professionals perceive themselves to demonstrate some of the dimensions that Marsick and Watkins (1993) outline in their model of a Learning Organization. Leadership of this organization must enhance efforts to expand the dimensions where strength is needed and to foster an environment where barriers are minimized. We must engage in leadership development building on mutual trust to support interpersonal competence and at the same time enhance the social capital of the organization. Mutual trust is a key element fostered by a strong psychological safety net and the Agape Love that Senge (1990) so strongly recommends, both contributing toward a climate of freedom to create new learning and ways of responding to change, ever mindful of the needs and concerns of others. Morale is not compromised when such an open, democratic, and accepting environment exists. This chapter provides suggestions to accomplish this task and will be valuable as we move forward with CYFAR programming.

CYFAR national leadership recognized the strain that extension systems nationwide face rallying resources to focus on targeted community projects. In response, the new CYFAR projects are limited to two target communities for the five year funding

cycle. In comparison, the first CYFAR project operated on one-third the current annual funding support for CYFAR projects and addressed seven target communities, placing a drain on Extension staffing and operations resources. The CYFAR project success is based on UVM Extension CYFAR professionals forming collaborations with community partners; marshalling local, state, federal and private foundation resources in support of community programming. The dimensions of a learning organization will be incorporated as these community collaborations are developed, expanding the social capital within the community to address local needs of Children, Youth and Families at Risk.

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## APPENDIX A

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

**The University of Vermont**  
**COMMITTEES ON HUMAN RESEARCH**


SERVING THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
AND FLETCHER ALLEN HEALTH CARE  
WEB SITE: [HTTP://WWW.UVM.EDU/IRB/](http://www.uvm.edu/irb/)

**RESEARCH PROTECTIONS OFFICE**

OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROGRAMS  
245 SOUTH PARK, SUITE 900, COLCHESTER, VT 05446  
TELEPHONE: (802) 656-5040 FAX: (802) 656-5041

August 1, 2006

MEMO TO: Sarah Ellen Rowe

FROM: Gale Weld, Research Review Administrator 

SUBJECT: CHRBS 07-008  
"Perceptions of UVM Extension as a Learning Organization"

According to federal regulations, certain types of research activities are "exempt" from formal Committee review and approval. University policy, however, requires that all projects which involve human subjects be submitted to the Committee office for at least an informal review.

Following such a review of your project, it has been determined that it qualifies for exemption under Section 46.101 of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please find attached your project exemption certification.

It is University policy to require all research to be conducted in accordance with the Belmont Report, which sets forth ethical principles for research involving humans as subjects. A copy of this report is available on our website under Rules, Regulations, and Guidance.

Submit any proposed project modifications which affect human subjects for review prior to implementation (i.e. surveys, questionnaires, changes to on-line interventions, etc.). Modifications may affect the original determination of exemption.

Where consent forms are being used, you will find an IRB stamp on the signature page of the form with no expiration date. It is recommended that consent forms and any information sheets clearly describe the nature and possible risks of the research. It is also recommended that the following contact information be provided:

"You may contact Dr. [.....], the Investigator in charge of this study, at [---...-....] for more information about this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project you should contact Nancy Stalnaker, the Institutional Review Board Program Director at the University of Vermont at 802-656-5040."

Thank you for contacting us.

The University of Vermont  
COMMITTEES ON HUMAN RESEARCH  
SERVING THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
AND FLETCHER ALLEN HEALTH CARE  
WEB SITE: www.uvm.edu/irb

RESEARCH PROTECTIONS OFFICE  
OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROGRAMS  
245 South Park, Suite 900, Colchester, VT 05446  
Telephone (802) 656-5040 FAX: (802) 656-5041

### Protocol Exemption Review and Determination

CHRBS# : 07-008\*

PI: Sarah Ellen Rowe MS

Perceptions of UVM Extension as a Learning Organization

The IRB has determined that the above protocol meets the exemption criteria as indicated below under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

☐ **Exemption #1: Normal Educational Practices and Settings**

Research conducted in established, or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as

- (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or
- (ii) research on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

☒ **Exemption #2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations**

Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior, unless:

- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
- (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation, or deals with sensitive aspects of the subject's own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug abuse, sexual behavior or the use of alcohol.

\*Note: This exemption does not apply to research involving minors except for research involving educational tests or observation of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed. All other research projects with minors require IRB submission.

☐ **Exemption #3: Identifiable Subjects in Special Circumstances**

Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior that is not exempt under exemption #2, if:

- (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or
- (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

☐ **Exemption #4: Collection or Study of Existing Data**

Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

☐ **Exemption #5: Public Benefit or Service Programs**

Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of the [Federal] Department or Agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:

- (i) Public benefit or service programs;
- (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;
- (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or
- (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

☐ **Exemption #6: Taste and Food Evaluation and Acceptance Studies**

Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies,

- (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or
- (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food and Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Assurance number for University of Vermont and State Agricultural College: FWA 00000723

IRB Numbers: IRB 00000485, 00000486

(Fletcher Allen Health Care Assurance number: FWA 00000727)

This exemption is effective for the duration of the project UNLESS modifications are made that affect the original determination of exemption.

Institutional Signature/Date:  
Name and Title of Official:

*Gale Weld 8/1/06*  
Gale A. Weld  
Research Review Administrator



Protocol for *Perceptions of UVM Extension Professionals as a Learning Organization*

93 Extension professionals identified including faculty, program staff and administrative staff and e-mail addresses assembled. 30 of the 93 identified program to Children, Youth and Families at Risk funded project currently operating or serve as their direct supervisor.

E-mail notice of survey, *Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire*, outlining the process and URL for Informed Consent and survey.

Process:

1. Review Informed Consent information
2. Click “I accept” to continue
3. Read survey directions
4. Complete the survey and submit

2 weeks following the e-mail notice of survey, a second notice will go to all including a thank you for those who have completed the survey and a reminder of the closing date for surveys to be submitted.

Data will be collected on the UVM server in a password protected file through the duration of the survey.

Following the close date for the survey, the website will be closed and data extracted from the server for analysis by the researcher.

## Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in the ***Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire***. This study is being conducted by Ellen Rowe, UVM Extension Associate Professor as part of her doctorate degree requirements.

The purpose of the study is to gain the perception of UVM Extension professionals related to their organization and the characteristics of a learning organization. The primary objective of this study is to compare and contrast characteristics of a recently reformed organization against known characteristics of a *learning organization*. In doing so, the evaluation process seeks to identify strengths and weaknesses of the existing organization in order to develop an asset-based strategic plan. Specifically, this study will assess and evaluate the perceptions of employees working for a program area of the University of Vermont's Extension Services, namely those professionals working to provide Children, Youth and Families at Risk programming. Perceptions will be assessed using the *Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire* (DLOQ) survey by Watkins and Marsick (1997).

Your voluntary participation will take approximately 20 minutes and involve:

- reviewing this consent information;
- clicking "I accept" to reflect your informed consent and agreement to continue;
- reading survey directions; and
- completing the survey.

The on-line survey involves neither participant identification nor sensitive questions. There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Benefits of participating in the study may include the satisfaction associated with clarifying your perception related to UVM Extension as a learning organization and contributing valuable feedback to this study.

**Thank you for your assistance in this study of UVM Extension as a Learning Organization. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.**

### Contact Information:

You may contact Ellen Rowe, the Investigator in charge of this study, at (802) 751-8307 x3200 or Ellen.Rowe@uvm.edu, for more information about this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or for more information on how to proceed should you believe that you have been injured as a result of your participation in this study you should contact Nancy Stalnaker, the Institutional Review Board Program Director at the University of Vermont at (802) 656-5040.

\_\_\_ I accept

\_\_\_ I do not accept

## APPENDIX B

### Survey Announcement

Date: Tue, 12 Sep 2006 11:36:47 -0400  
Reply-To: Doug Lantagne <doug.lantagne@uvm.edu>  
Sender: UVM Extension <UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU>  
From: Doug Lantagne <doug.lantagne@uvm.edu>  
Subject: Help needed! Contribute time toward a colleague's research!  
To: UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU

Here is how you help! Read below to understand how your responses will be used and answer the survey when it comes. Ellen and I will be grateful for your participation.

As part of Ellen's research for her doctorate degree, she will be surveying all UVM Extension employees to gain an understanding of the UVM Extension organization in relation to the characteristics of a learning organization, clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses, and develop an asset-based strategic plan to bring about the change. In recent years, learning organization concepts have been used to manage organizations both in business and in education. Your participation in this survey will assist in my understanding of a learning organization, as well as identifying strengths and weaknesses of our organization.

This study will use data gathered on perceptions of the UVM Extension organization at a single point in time using the *Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire* (DLOQ) survey by Watkins and Marsick (1997). The instrument addresses each of the seven action imperatives as described by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) and Marsick and Watkins (1999). The DLOQ questionnaire has a total of 43 questions. Six additional questions would be included to gain demographic information of the participants. The consent form is first page of the web access and participants must click on "I accept" to continue. Time commitment to complete the survey is estimated at 20 minutes.

So when the survey comes to your inbox....please help out Ellen as she works to complete her doctoral degree! Maybe she will even mention how good we were in helping her with her research in the dissertation itself. A great sample size is important so that it captures a range of personnel in the organization.

Thanks,  
Doug

Douglas O. Lantagne  
Director  
UVM Extension  
19 Roosevelt Highway, Suite 305  
Colchester, VT 05446  
[www.uvm.edu/extension/](http://www.uvm.edu/extension/)

UVM Extension: Cultivating Healthy Communities

Phone 802 656 2990  
Fax 802 656 8642

Date: Wed, 20 Sep 2006 15:48:52 -0400  
Reply-To: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Sender: UVM Extension <UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU>  
From: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Subject: Survey Invitation  
To: UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU

Colleagues,

You are invited to participate in an organizational study of UVM's Extension services. I am conducting this study as part of my doctorate degree requirements.

The primary objective of this study is to compare and contrast characteristics of a recently reformed organization against known characteristics of a *learning organization*. In doing so, the evaluation process seeks to identify strengths and weaknesses of UVM's Extension services in order to develop an asset-based strategic plan. Specifically, this study will assess and evaluate the perceptions of professionals working to provide programming in the area of Children, Youth and Families at Risk. Perceptions will be assessed using the *Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire* (DLOQ) survey by Watkins and Marsick (1997).

Your voluntary participation will take approximately 20 minutes and involve: reviewing this consent information;

- clicking "I accept" to reflect your informed consent and agreement to continue;
- reading survey directions; and
- completing the survey.

The on-line survey involves neither participant identification nor sensitive questions. There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Benefits of participating in the study may include the satisfaction associated with clarifying your perception related to UVM Extension as a learning organization and contributing valuable feedback to this study.

**Thank you for your assistance in this study. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.**

Click here to begin: <http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmext/perseus/rowe/survey.htm>

*UVM Extension.....Cultivating Healthy Communities*

Ellen Rowe

## APPENDIX C

### Survey

User-Agent: Microsoft-Entourage/10.1.1.2418  
Date: Thu, 10 Mar 2005 16:34:55 -0500  
Subject: Re: Interest in DLOQ  
From: Karen Watkins <kwatkins@uga.edu>  
To: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>

On 3/10/05 9:37 AM, "Ellen Rowe" <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu> wrote:  
Hi Ellen,

Then we are delighted that you will be using it. I am attaching an easy to use self- scoring version for your use. Let me know if I can help further in any way.

Regards,

Karen

## DIMENSIONS OF THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Developed by Karen E. Watkins and Victoria J. Marsick<sup>1</sup>

*A learning organization is one that learns continuously and transforms itself . . . . Learning is a continuous, strategically used process — integrated with and running parallel to work.*

In the last decade, organizations have experienced wave after wave of rapid transformation as global markets and external political and economic changes make it impossible for any business or service—whether private, public, or nonprofit—to cling to past ways of doing work. A learning organization arises from the total change strategies that institutions of all types are using to help navigate these challenges. Learning organizations proactively use learning in an integrated way to support and catalyze growth for individual workers, teams and other groups, entire organizations, and (at times) the institutions and communities with which they are linked.

In this questionnaire, you are asked to think about how UVM Extension supports and uses learning at an individual, team and organizational level. From this data, we will be able to identify the strengths you can continue to build upon and the areas of greatest strategic leverage for development toward becoming a learning organization.

Please respond to each of the following items. For each item, determine the degree to which this is something that is or is not true of UVM Extension. If the item refers to a practice which rarely or never occurs, score it a one [1]. If it is almost always true of your department or work group, score the item a six [6]. Fill in your response by clicking the appropriate number on the survey.

Example: In this example, if you believe that leaders often look for opportunities to learn, you might score this as a four [4] by selecting 4 on the survey.

Question	Almost					Almost
	Never					Always
In my organization, leaders continually look for opportunities to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6

*There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your perception of where things are at this time.*

**Thank you for completing this survey.**

---

<sup>1</sup> © 1997 Karen E. Watkins & Victoria J. Marsick. All rights reserved. The authors wish to thank Baiyin Yang, Tom Valentine, and Judy O'Neil for their assistance in validating this questionnaire.

This questionnaire is based on books by Karen Watkins and Victoria Marsick: *Sculpting the Learning Organization*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1993; and *In Action: Creating the Learning Organization*, Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press, 1996.



Question	Almost Never					Almost Always	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	

### Individual Level

1. In my organization, people openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them.
2. In my organization, people identify skills they need for future work tasks.
3. In my organization, people help each other learn.
4. In my organization, people can get money and other resources to support their learning.
5. In my organization, people are given time to support learning.
6. In my organization, people view problems in their work as an opportunity to learn.
7. In my organization, people are rewarded for learning.
8. In my organization, people give open and honest feedback to each other.
9. In my organization, people listen to others' views before speaking.
10. In my organization, people are encouraged to ask "why" regardless of rank.
11. In my organization, whenever people state their view, they also ask what others think.
12. In my organization, people treat each other with respect.
13. In my organization, people spend time building trust with each other.

### Team or Group Level

14. In my organization, teams/groups have the freedom to adapt their goals as needed.
15. In my organization, teams/groups treat members as equals, regardless of rank, culture, or other differences.
16. In my organization, teams/groups focus both on the group's task and on how well the group is working.
17. In my organization, teams/groups revise their thinking as a result of group discussions or information collected.
18. In my organization, teams/groups are rewarded for their achievements as a team/group.
19. In my organization, teams/groups are confident that the organization will act on their recommendations.

### Organization Level

20. My organization uses two-way communication on a regular basis, such as suggestion systems, electronic bulletin boards, or town hall/open meetings.
21. My organization enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily.
22. My organization maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills.
23. My organization creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance.
24. My organization makes its lessons learned available to all employees.

25. My organization measures the results of the time and resources spent on training.
26. My organization recognizes people for taking initiative.
27. My organization gives people choices in their work assignments.
28. My organization invites people to contribute to the organization's vision.
29. My organization gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work.
30. My organization supports employees who take calculated risks.
31. My organization builds alignment of visions across different levels and work groups.
32. My organization helps employees balance work and family.
33. My organization encourages people to think from a global perspective.
34. My organization encourages everyone to bring the customers' views into the decision making process.
35. My organization considers the impact of decisions on employee morale.
36. My organization works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs.
37. My organization encourages people to get answers from across the organization when solving problems.
38. In my organization, leaders generally support requests for learning opportunities and training.
39. In my organization, leaders share up to date information with employees about competitors, industry trends, and organizational directions.
40. In my organization, leaders empower others to help carry out the organization's vision.
41. In my organization, leaders mentor and coach those they lead.
42. In my organization, leaders continually look for opportunities to learn.
43. In my organization, leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with its values.

### **Additional Information about You and Your Organization**

*In this section, select the answer which best describes you or your organization.*

44. How is your UVM Extension position funded?
  1. Base funds (50% or more on base funding)
  2. Soft funding (50% or more on Grants or Contracts)
45. Where is your UVM Extension office located?
  1. Off-Campus: Central/Northeast Region
  2. Off-Campus: Northwest Region
  3. Off-Campus: Southern Region
  4. On-Campus
46. How long have you been employed by UVM Extension?
  1. Less than 5 years
  2. 5 to 14 years
  3. 15 to 24 years
  4. Over 25 years
47. Do you program in the area of Children, Youth and Families **or** support programming in this area?
  1. Yes
  2. No
48. Which job title category best describes your UVM Extension position?
  1. Administrative Staff
  2. Faculty
  3. Program Staff
49. At what level do you participate in programming for Children, Youth and Families at Risk?
  1. Not at all
  2. Some, but less than 25% of my time
  3. Moderate, more than 25% but less than half of my time
  4. Extensive, more than half of my time

## APPENDIX D

### Survey Thank You and Follow-Up Announcement

Date: Mon, 16 Oct 2006 14:47:31 -0400  
Reply-To: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Sender: UVM Extension <UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU>  
From: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Subject: Final days for survey  
To: UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU

Colleagues,

For those of you who have responded to my earlier **survey invitation**, thank you!! I really appreciate your willingness to participate.

For those of you who are still interested in participating, the **final days are fast approaching. I anticipate closing the survey on October 30th.**

I am conducting this study as part of my doctorate degree requirements. The primary objective of this study is to compare and contrast characteristics of a recently reformed organization against known characteristics of a *learning organization*. In doing so, the evaluation process seeks to identify strengths and weaknesses of UVM's Extension services in order to develop an asset-based strategic plan. Specifically, this study will assess and evaluate the perceptions of professionals working to provide programming in the area of Children, Youth and Families at Risk. Perceptions will be assessed using the *Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire* (DLOQ) survey by Watkins and Marsick (1997).

Your voluntary participation will take approximately 20 minutes and involve: reviewing this consent information;

- clicking "I accept" to reflect your informed consent and agreement to continue;
- reading survey directions; and
- completing the survey.

The on-line survey involves neither participant identification nor sensitive questions. There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Benefits of participating in the study may include the satisfaction associated with clarifying your perception related to UVM Extension as a learning organization and contributing valuable feedback to this study.

**Thank you for your assistance in this study. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.**

Click here to begin: <http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmext/perseus/rowe/survey.htm>

## APPENDIX E

### Survey Last Call Announcement

Date: Mon, 4 Dec 2006 13:38:51 -0500  
Reply-To: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Sender: UVM Extension <UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU>  
From: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Subject: Still needing some help  
To: UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU

Colleagues,

Thanks to all of you who participated in the brief survey on **UVM Extension as a Learning Organization**. The response rate is still a bit low and I really need your help. The survey is part of my dissertation research and will take but a few minutes of your time. **If you have not already taken the survey, please consider participating before December 15th**. Just click on the link provided below.

Thanks.  
Ellen

<http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmext/perseus/rowe/survey.htm>

Date: Wed, 3 Jan 2007 08:18:21 -0500  
Reply-To: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Sender: UVM Extension <UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU>  
From: Ellen Rowe <ellen.rowe@uvm.edu>  
Subject: Thank You to survey responders  
To: UVMEXT@LIST.UVM.EDU

Colleagues,

Thanks to all of you who took the time to thoughtfully complete the survey serving as the basis for my dissertation research. I really appreciate your efforts!

Thanks again,  
Ellen